



Department of Justice

HOLD FOR RELEASE
Tuesday, August 1, 1972
10:00 a.m.

Charges that the United States was duped in the burning of 26 tons of opium in Thailand last March 7th were debunked today by the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs (BNDD).

The charge was leveled yesterday by columnist Jack Anderson who said the Thai government was victimized when "fodder" with only a slight percentage of opium was burned by the Thais who hailed the destruction of the narcotics.

Andrew C. Tartaglino, Deputy Director of the BNDD, termed Anderson's charges "irresponsible" and damaging to the Thai-U.S. effort to crackdown on the flow of drugs to illicit world markets.

He pointed out that two narcotics experts from BNDD were on hand at a military base near Chiang Mai where the opium was collected and burned.

"A senior forensic chemist for BNDD, Joseph E. Koles, and BNDD Southeast Asia Regional Director William T. Wanzeck collected samples at random and tested smears from each of the 319 bags of raw opium that was later burned by the Thais," Tartaglino told a press conference today.

Anderson said yesterday "either through corruption or stupidity, the Thai officials failed to test the huge mounds of opium before they soaked it with gasoline and put it to the torch."

At the press conference, Tartaglino introduced films of the Thai opium burning which showed Koles and Wanzeck collecting and testing samples from the stacks of bags containing the raw opium.

All the samples tested exhibited all the characteristics of genuine opium, said Koles, a forensic chemist since 1958 who has tested thousands of opium samples from all over the world.

The opium was in individually wrapped balls weighing between 185 and 191 pounds. The balls were wrapped in leaves, paper and plastic and sealed in 319 burlap bags.

Tartaglino reported the BNDD representatives sampled each of the bags by randomly cutting into each with a knife and withdrawing a small amount of the contents with a wooden applicator stick. Each stick was placed in a test tube and later examined under a microscope.

Tartaglino said that both BNDD representatives were impressed with the detailed security arrangements, cross-checks and verification procedures exercised by the Thais in the collection, storage and destruction of the opium.

#

FACT SHEET

Allegations contained in the Jack Anderson Column
of Monday, July 31, 1972
and the rebuttal

Allegation:

- 1) "The real story is that Thailand and, indirectly, the U.S. were hornswoggled into believing that 26 tons of opium were burned, when, in fact, most of it was cheap fodder."
- 2) "Instead of loading raw opium, they pushed 100 mules with fodder, other plant matter, chemicals and about 20 percent opium."
- 3) "In all, the cagy dope peddlers passed off five tons of opium as 26 tons and pocketed more than \$2 million from the fantastic hoax."
- 4) "Either through corruption or stupidity, the Thai officials failed to test the huge mounds of 'opium' before they soaked it with gasoline and put it to the torch."
- 5) "Only as the smell of burning molasses wafted through Chiang Mai did the Thais suspect they had been had. Then, it was too late to do anything but cover up their goof."
- 6) "And cover up they did. They hastily recruited gangs of workers to bury the 'hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of fodder and opium ashes."

Fact:

- 1) Test materials taken at random from the 319 bags scientifically proved the content was, in fact, crude opium.
- 2) The BNDD forensic chemist, Joseph E. Koles, reports that the Thai opium samples contained no more debris and other plant material than is normally contained in balls of crude opium. The debris present came from the scraping of poppy pods during the extraction of the crude opium.
- 3) Each of the 319 bags was tested and found to contain opium. There was no hint of any adulteration to the bags. The tests would have disclosed it. There was no \$2 million transaction and no hoax.
- 4) The film bespeaks the fact that each of the bags of opium was tested, both by the Thai government and by a senior forensic chemist from BNDD.
- 5) There was no smell when the opium was being burned due to the tremendous heat. However, opium does have a distinctively sweet odor which both BNDD representatives recognized during the sampling.
- 6) A military bulldozer was used to scoop out a large trench prior to the burning. There was so little residue, however, that it could have been shoveled into a much smaller hole. No gangs had to be hastily recruited to bury the leftovers.

Statement of
Mr. Andrew C. Tartaglino
Deputy Director for Operations
Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs

Yesterday morning, the Jack Anderson column said the U. S. Government and Thai authorities were victimized into believing that 26 tons of opium were burned and that what was alleged to be opium was nothing more than cheap fodder mixed with 20 percent opium.

The Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs has the major share of the responsibility for coordinating this matter with the Thai authorities, and we feel it necessary to respond.

The allegations in the article are totally inaccurate. Neither the Thai nor U. S. Government was duped with regard to the operation. The burning of the 26 tons of opium took place on March 7, 1972. The opium was contained in 319 sealed burlap bags, each weighing about 190 pounds. The bags contained 20 opium balls which were wrapped in leaves, paper or plastic.

Contrary to what Mr. Anderson reports, the Thai Government did test the opium before buying it. And our chemist tested it before it was burned. There is no question: It was opium.

Mr. William T. Wanzeck, the BNDD Regional Director in Southeast Asia for the past six years, was present for the burning. He took the samples which were analyzed by Mr. Joseph E. Koles, a senior forensic chemist with the Bureau. There was no question in either man's mind that the sacks contained anything other than opium. Both officials also examined the security arrangements made by the Thai authorities and were highly impressed by the entire operation. Messrs. Wanzeck and Koles are here today and will be available to respond to your questions in their areas of responsibility, as will I.

As for Mr. Anderson, if the allegations which appeared in his column had been checked with the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, we would have offered the same evidence we are giving you here today.

The Thai Government has stepped up its anti-drug activities and is serious in its efforts to shut off the flow of drugs from Southeast Asia to the United States. The fact sheet which you were given with my statement attests to their diligence.

We didn't ask you to come here today just to listen to what we had to say. We also have something to show you. Please bear with us for these brief excerpts taken from hundreds of feet of film shot during the burning operation.

(FILM)

With the facts that we have set forth here today, the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs calls on Mr. Anderson to correct the multitude of errors in his article. The American public is entitled to the factual version. Equally as important, Thailand, with its integrity at stake, is entitled to a clearing up of these irresponsible charges.

The maximum success of this joint effort is based on mutual respect and trust which has developed between the United States and Thai narcotic teams.

To allow such misinformation to go unchallenged would be to damage the Thai/U.S. crack down on the flow of narcotics into the illicit world market, most particularly into this country. To allow it to go uncorrected is up to Mr. Anderson.

U.S./THAI COOPERATIVE EFFORT

(Since March 1972)

- (1) On March 8, 1972, American citizen Steven Roy Buck was arrested at Hualampany Railroad Station in Bangkok on his return from Chiang Mai where he had obtained nine pounds of pure heroin. Buck, a 25-year old Vietnam war veteran, admitted to profiteering in the Vietnamese black market and that he learned of the ready availability of heroin in Thailand while stationed there. Upon his discharge and return to the United States he entered into a conspiracy to smuggle heroin from Thailand to the States. He recruited at least five young female couriers who were to carry the contraband back in their underclothing. At least one successful trip had been accomplished prior to Buck's arrest.

On March 14, 1972, four American teenage girls were arrested by Thai Police after they arrived in Bangkok to assist Buck in smuggling the heroin back to the States. Opium and marihuana were found in their possession. The girls admitted that Buck was paying them \$2,000 each to smuggle the drugs.

- (2) Following a period of three month's undercover negotiations, a delivery of eight pounds of pure heroin was made to a BNDD agent in Bangkok on March 14 by Singa Saechian at which time he was arrested by Thai police. Singa admitted to being a long-time trafficker. According to the police, Singa obtained the heroin from Chiang Mai Province in Northern Thailand.
- (3) In April a source reported that suspects working out of Visitors Center Tourist Agency in Bangkok were selling pure heroin to American tourists. A BNDD agent was introduced to the suspects and negotiated for a delivery of three pounds of heroin. Upon delivery the suspects, Phisit Viwariathira and Sutichai, were arrested by Thai Police.
- (4) On May 9 following an undercover investigation by BNDD agent, Artit Irithaphuri was arrested as he delivered approximately three pounds of pure heroin. This investigation was closely coordinated with Thai police and U.S. Air Force's Office of Special Investigation. Artit is a principal source of supply for U.S. military personnel at Ubon Air Force Base and distributes heroin in both Ubon, Bangkok and Nakhon Phanom.
- (5) On May 26, American citizen Thomas Gary Caudill was arrested by Thai police assisted by BNDD at a Bangkok hotel in possession of approximately 500 LSD "orange sunshine" tablets and small amounts of marihuana and hashish. This is the largest seizure of LSD ever made in Thailand and represents the first case made since the passage of Thai law against LSD.

- 2 -

- (6) June 9, Thai police arrested one subject after he delivered 9 1/4 pounds of pure #4 heroin to BNDD undercover agent, as result of extensive undercover negotiations.
- (7) Also on June 9 -- Acting on information provided by BNDD informant, BNDD agents and Thai Special Narcotics officers raided a compound in Lampang, seizing approximately 3,520 pounds of raw opium, a large number of containers of chemicals, and two liquid transport trucks which had been modified to conceal contraband. Four persons were arrested.
- (8) July 8 -- Thailand task force officers, Chaing Mai BNDD personnel and Border Patrol Police conducted simultaneous raids on three villages in remote Chiang Doa District. Raids resulted in four separate seizures totaling 646 pounds of crude opium, two M-1 carbines, one semi-automatic pistol and one hand grenade. Two subjects were arrested, including a Thai police sergeant major who was found in possession of approximately 108 pounds of the opium, an unauthorized weapon and ordinance. Two others are subject to arrest when located.
- (9) July 15, BNDD Bangkok agents assisted Thai Police in executing a raid at a Bangkok residence. One suspect attempted to flee but was captured by Thai police. Arrested inside the premises was a 36-year old Chinese male. Seized at the premises were 51.7 pounds of #3 "red rock" heroin.

The premises was used as a laboratory for production of #3 heroin and one person arrested is believed to be the chemist. Many items of laboratory paraphernalia were found on the premises. A loaded .38 caliber revolver was also seized.

- (10) July 24 -- Sweeping down on two compounds in the Mae Sai area of Northern Thailand, BNDD agents and officer of the Thai Special Narcotics Office seized more than three and a half tons of opium, guns, rifles and vehicles used to transport the narcotics to clandestine markets in Bangkok.

On Sunday (July 23), Thai police and BNDD agents hit a compound at Doi Paa Mii and seized 138 pounds of raw opium, rifles and a grenade launcher.

The next day (July 24) the U.S. and Thai team raided a second compound in the area seizing 4,818 pounds of raw opium, 776 pounds of smoking opium, 686 pounds of morphine and 15 pounds of heroin. The agents arrested six persons, seized five guns and two vehicles.

The total U.S. illicit street value of the narcotics seized on July 23 and 24 was estimated at \$249 million.